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AUTHOR Pinkerton, Sandra
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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses itself to the way in which K'ekchi speakers identify the subject and the object in simple sentences. An attempt is made to determine: (1) whether K'ekchi has a basic word order, (2) the possible functions of any derived word order, and (3) whether there are any constraints on the logically possible word orders in K'ekchi. A native informant was given several sets of conditions, consisting of one verb and two noun phrases, and then presented with six logically possible word orders for each set. The informant was asked which of these could be interpreted as the particular set of conditions first presented, and what difference in meaning existed between different acceptable word orders. Later, the results of this analysis were contrasted to answers given by three other informants. For two of the informants, only VOS, SVO, and SOV were acceptable; for the other two, only VOS, SVO, and SOV were acceptable except in cases where the subject was animate and the object inanimate. In those cases, any order was acceptable. In general, results indicated that: (1) VOS is the basic word order, with SVO and SOV being derived orders; (2) SVO and SOV have particular functions which differentiate them from VOS; and (3) there are constraints on word order in K'ekchi. (AM)

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Word Order and the Antipassive in K'ekchi[1]

Sandra Pinkerton
University of California, Los Angeles

This paper addresses itself to the way in which K'ekchi speakers identify the subject and the object in simple sentences. It is motivated by what I took to be two conflicting statements about Mayan languages when I first began looking at K'ekchi: (I) Mayan languages are scrambling languages, and (II) VOS is the basic word order of Mayan languages with a few of them exhibiting a tendency toward SVO. It seemed to me, at the time, that if K'ekchi were a scrambling language, it could not have a basic word order, for the term scrambling seemed to mean that any word order would do. On the other hand, if K'ekchi did have a basic word order, then it seemed to me that orders other than the basic one might have a function in the language, again, conflicting with the idea that any word order would do.

Thus, I set as my task the answering of the following questions about K'ekchi:

(a) Does K'ekchi have a basic word order or is K'ekchi a "scrambling" language?

(b) If K'ekchi has a basic word order, what function might any change in that word order have?

(c) Are there any constraints on the logically possible word orders in K'ekchi?

In order to answer these questions I devised the following elicitation scheme:

(i) My language consultant, Flora Ac, was given several sets of conditions. An example of one such set follows

sak' (hit) - the action
li c'i? (the dog) - the receiver of the action
li ẇi:nq (the man) - the agent of the action

The animacy[2] of the two noun phrases was systematically varied for each set of conditions. Later, the specificity of the two noun phrases was varied for one of the sets previously investigated.

(ii) Flora was then presented with the six logically possible word orders the two noun phrases and

the verb could assume. She was asked which of these could be interpreted as the particular set of conditions first presented. For example:

Conditions	Logically Possible Word Orders[3]
sak' - action	(1) šsak' li c'i? li ẇi:nq. (VOS)
li c'i? - receiver	(2) šsak' li ẇi:nq li c'i?. (VSO)
li ẇi:nq - agent	(3) li ẇi:nq šsak' li c'i?. (SVO)
	(4) li c'i? šsak' li ẇi:nq. (OVS)
	(5) li ẇi:nq li c'i? šsak'. (SOV)
	(6) li c'i? li ẇi:nq šsak'. (OSV)

(iii) Finally, if more than one word order were possible, Flora was asked to characterize the difference in 'meaning', if any, between the word orders. Much later, the results of the first study (with Flora) were presented to three other language consultants, Amanda Katun, Francisco Chen, and Ernesto Tzul, in her presence.

Flora's responses to each set for which animacy was varied are presented below as well as the reactions of the other consultants to her data. Only negative or doubtful responses are shown, thus a blank means the sentence is equivalent to the conditions presented her, a ? means the sentence is doubtful in its equivalency or grammaticality and a * means the sentence is not equivalent or is ungrammatical.

subject-animate; object-inanimate	Coban	Chamelco[4]
(7) šẇa? li ẇa li c'i?. (VOS)		
(8) šẇa? li c'i? li ẇa. (VSO)		?
(9) li c'i? šẇa? li ẇa. (SVO)		
(10) li ẇa šẇa? li c'i?. (OVS)		?
(11) li c'i? li ẇa šẇa?. (SOV)		
(12) li ẇa li c'i? šẇa?. (OSV)		?
'The dog ate the tortilla.'		
subject-inanimate; object-inanimate		
(13) št'an li če? li ?iq'. (VOS)		
(14) št'an li ?iq' li če?. (VSO)		?
(15) li ?iq' št'an li če?. (SVO)		
(16) li če? št'an li ?iq'. (OVS)		?
(17) li ?iq' li če? št'an. (SOV)		
(18) li če? li ?iq' št'an. (OSV)		?
'The wind blew down the tree.'		

subject-animate; object-animate	Coban	Chamelco
(19) šṫiw li ẇi:nq li c'i?. (VOS)		
(20) šṫiw li c'i? li ẇi:nq. (VSO)	?	?
(21) li c'i? šṫiw li ẇi:nq. (SVO)		
(22) li ẇi:nq šṫiw li c'i?. (OVS)	?	?
(23) li c'i? li ẇi:nq šṫiw. (SOV)		
(24) li ẇi:nq li c'i? šṫiw. (OSV)	*	*
'The dog bit the man.'		

subject-inanimate; object-animate		
(25) špic' li ẇi:nq li ka:r. (VOS)		
(26) špic' li ka:r li ẇi:nq. (VSO)	*	*
(27) li ka:r špic' li ẇi:nq. (SVO)		
(28) li ẇi:nq špic' li ka:r. (OVS)	*	*
(29) li ka:r li ẇi:nq špic'. (SOV)		
(30) li ẇi:nq li ka:r špic'. (OSV)	*	*
'The car squashed the man.'		

It is interesting that the consultants divided up so uniformly in terms of their responses: Amanda and Flora, both from Coban; Ernesto and Francisco, both from Chamelco. One can speculate that perhaps the sensitivity to the feature animate depends on whether the speaker is female or on whether the speaker is from Coban or on whether the speaker is female and from Coban.

Some speakers, e.g., Francisco and Ernesto, use only word order for identifying the subject and the object in a simple sentence. In their case, VOS, SVO and SOV are the possible word orders in K'ekchi. Other speakers, e.g., Flora and Amanda, use both animacy and word order for identifying the subject and the object in a simple sentence. In their case, when both the subject and the object are animate as in sentences 19-24 or when the subject is inanimate and the object is animate as in sentences 25-30, their responses are in agreement with those of Ernesto and Francisco - VOS, SVO and SOV are the possible word orders in K'ekchi. However, when the subject is animate and the object is inanimate as in sentences 7-12, all word orders are possible for them for they can identify the subject by its animacy. Similarly, in sentences 13-18, some characteristic of the lexical item li ?iq' (the wind), perhaps its inherent motion, in relation to the verb t'an (fall) allows them to interpret it as the subject.

All of the verbs in sentences 7-30 are unidirectional. That is, the action proceeds from one generally identifiable noun phrase to the other. For example, in

sentences 25-30, in which one noun phrase is the car and the other noun phrase is the man, it is unlikely that the man will squash the car. Thus, the action is unidirectional - it may only proceed from the car to the man and not vice-versa. Below are the results for allowed word order using a bidirectional verb.

subject-animate; object-animate

(31) šra:lina li c'i? li ẇi:nq.(VOS)
(32) li ẇi:nq šra:lina li c'i?.(SVO)
(33) li ẇi:nq li c'i? šra:lina.(SOV)
'The man chased the dog.'

(34) šra:lina li ẇi:nq li c'i?.(VOS)
(35) li c'i? šra:lina li ẇi:nq.(SVO)
(36) li c'i? li ẇi:nq šra:lina.(SOV)
'The dog chased the man.'

Note that for the set of conditions in which the man is the agent and the dog is the receiver of the action only three word orders are possible - VOS, SVO and SOV. The same holds true for the reverse set of conditions, both findings consistent with the results for unidirectional verbs.

The data presented in sentences 7-36 begin to answer one of the original questions I asked about K'ekchi. There are, in fact, constraints on the logically possible word orders in K'ekchi (question c, paragraph 2, first page). For some speakers, only three word orders are possible - VOS, SVO and SOV. For other speakers VSO, OVS and OSV are also possible word orders, but only when the subject is animate and the object is inanimate or when an inanimate subject having certain 'animacy' features is found in a sentence with an inanimate object.

Further data presented below show that the specificity of subjects is also a factor which constrains the logically possible word orders.

subject-specific; object-non-specific[5]		All speakers
(37) šsak' xun[6] c'i? li ẇi:nq.	(VOS)	
(38) šsak' li ẇi:nq xun c'i?.	(VSO)	?
(39) li ẇi:nq šsak' xun c'i?.	(SVO)	
(40) xun c'i? šsak' li ẇi:nq.	(OVS)	?
(41) li ẇi:nq xun c'i? šsak'.	(SOV)	
(42) xun c'i? li ẇi:nq šsak'.	(OSV)	*

subject-specific; object-specific		All speakers
(43)	šsak' li c'i? li ẇi:nq. (VOS)	
(44)	šsak' li ẇi:nq li c'i?. (VSO)	?
(45)	li ẇi:nq šsak' li c'i?. (SVO)	
(46)	li c'i? šsak' li ẇi:nq. (OVS)	?
(47)	li ẇi:nq li c'i? šsak'. (SOV)	
(48)	li c'i? li ẇi:nq šsak'. (OSV)	*
subject-non-specific; object-non-specific		
(49)	šsak' xun c'i? xun ẇi:nq. (VOS)	?
(50)	šsak' xun ẇi:nq xun c'i?. (VSO)	*
(51)	xun ẇi:nq šsak' xun c'i?. (SVO)	?
(52)	xun c'i? šsak' xun ẇi:nq. (OVS)	*
(53)	xun ẇi:nq xun c'i? šsak'. (SOV)	?
(54)	xun c'i? xun ẇi:nq šsak'. (OSV)	*
subject-non-specific; object-specific		
(55)	šsak' xun ẇi:nq li c'i?. (VOS)	?
(56)	šsak' li c'i? xun ẇi:nq. (VSO)	*
(57)	xun ẇi:nq šsak' li c'i?. (SVO)	?
(58)	li c'i? šsak' xun ẇi:nq. (OVS)	*
(59)	xun ẇi:nq li c'i? šsak'. (SOV)	?
(60)	li c'i? xun ẇi:nq šsak'. (OSV)	*

The doubtful or ungrammatical sentences in the first two sets (sentences 37-48) reflect the standard reactions to sentences having both an animate subject and an animate object.[7] However, all of the sentences in the second two sets (sentences 49-60) are doubtful or ungrammatical, and in each set the subjects of the sentences are non-specific. It is interesting that in the latter case, VSO, OVS and OSV are ungrammatical while VOS, SVO and SOV are doubtful, i.e., somewhat better in terms of grammaticality or acceptability. Clearly, the object, alone, may not be placed before the verb nor may it be separated from the verb by the subject.[8] Word orders in which this occurs, i.e., the object, alone, is found before the verb (OVS) or the subject separates the object from the verb (VSO, OSV), are blocked.

The data in 49-60 suggests a question: what grammatical sentential format might propositions having unspecified subjects have? One of the functions of the Antipassive in K'ekchi is to provide an appropriate sentential format for sentences having unspecified subjects. Sentences 49-60 can all be expressed in a

form which is the output of the Antipassive. Thus, the Antipassive must apply obligatorily to sentences having unspecified subjects. Note sentences 61 and 62 following an example of the Antipassive.

Example: Antipassive

li ẇi:nq	x̌ -	ø -	sak' -	ok	re9 li c'iʔ
preposed subject	past	3rd abs (he)	hit	transitive abs	oblique obj

'The man hit the dog.'

(61) xun ẇi:nq x̌sak'ok re li c'iʔ. A man hit the dog.
(62) xun ẇi:nq x̌sak'ok re xun c'iʔ. A man hit a dog.

The Antipassive applies optionally to sentences having specific subjects and specific objects as seen in sentence 63. However, for the Coban speakers, when the subject is animate and specific and the object is inanimate and non-specific, the Antipassive may not apply as in sentence 64.

(63) li ẇi:nq x̌sak'ok re li c'iʔ. 'The man hit the
(64) *li iš̌q x̌loq'ok re xun b'as. dog.'

This last sentence - 64 - has precisely those conditions which allow for all of the logically possible word orders in K'ekchi as spoken by speakers from Coban. There is no difficulty in recovering the subject from the object - no need to highlight one noun phrase and demote another.

A further consequence of the application of the Antipassive which is consistent with the results shown in sentence 64 is that the demoted object may be preposed. Recall that in sentences which have not undergone the Antipassive and in which the animacy conditions are not felicitous, OVS and OSV word orders are blocked for all speakers. Once such sentences have undergone the Antipassive, the object may be preposed as shown below yielding an OSV re word order.

(65) li c'iʔ li ẇi:nq x̌sak'ok re. The dog, the man hit.

Thus, OSV re word orders are grammatical for all speakers. However, for the Coban speakers, where the animacy conditions permit all the logically possible word

orders, the Antipassive is blocked.

The data presented in sentences 7-65 show that there are constraints on the logically possible word orders in K'ekchi. K'ekchi is not a scrambling language in that not just any word order will do. The preferred word orders are VOS, SVO and SOV. Objects may be preposed when sentences have undergone the Antipassive yielding OSV re word orders. What I have not yet answered is what the basic word order in K'ekchi is nor have I discussed the functions of orders different from the basic word order.

The third part of the elicitation scheme discussed earlier was a request for Flora to characterize the difference in 'meaning', if any, between the possible word orders. This led to a number of anecdotal descriptions of appropriate contexts in which to use one order or another. Let me discuss my intuitions about an anecdotal example told by Flora which will set a frame of reference for a characterization of the functions of the different, permissible word orders.

In a conversation with a person who is hard of hearing who wants to know what happened outside, the first appropriate reply is:

(66) šsak' li c'iʔ li ẇi:nq. The man hit the dog.

The next repetition of the information not heard would be:

(67) li ẇi:nq šsak' li c'iʔ. The man hit the dog.

The final, most precise repetition of the information would be:

(68) li ẇi:nq šsak'ok re li c'iʔ. It was the man who hit the dog.

In these sentences, preposing the subject highlights it in relation to the object. The greatest contrast between the subject and the object is found in the case of the sentence having undergone the Antipassive in which the subject is preposed and the object is demoted. One can conclude that VOS is the basic word order in K'ekchi and that subject preposing (SVO) has the function of highlighting the subject in contrast to the object. An example of another context in which the subject is preposed - switch reference - is presented in 69f below. The preposed subject is underlined.

Rough translations are given for each sentence.

(69)[10] a. šiṅ̇yaxer rik'in li tik.
I sickened with the fever.

b. šinusa ca?č'in naq šcal kwi?čik
I felt better a bit when it came again

intik.
my fever.

c. šinsač inmec'e:w.
I lost my strength.

d. sa? xun čik kutan[11] inc'a? čik šinru
on e more day I was not able again

či trab'axik.
to work.

e. toxo?naq ško:in ci rilb'al li doctor.
Then I went to see the doctor.

f. li doctor kirisi inkik'el.
The doctor took out (some of) my blood.

g. kiṧye ẇe naq...
He said to me that...

Note that once the reference is switched there is no further subject preposing.

An example of yet another context in which there would be subject preposing is the case where someone asks who lost their strength thinking of several people who might have lost their strength. The appropriate answer would be 70, below. Contrast this with 69c.

(70) la?in šinsač inmec'e:w.
I I lost my strength.

Most characterizations of SVO and SOV word orders were based on the contrast of a particular noun phrase with other possible candidates the speaker might have in mind. Thus, SOV word orders were characterized as cases of double contrast, strengthening the conclusion that VOS is the basic word order in K'ekchi and SVO and SOV are derived word orders. The function of SVO

word orders is either to highlight the subject in relation to the object or to contrast the subject with other possible candidates which the speaker may be thinking of as the agent of the action. The function of SOV word orders is to contrast the subject with other possible candidates for agent of the action and to contrast the object with other possible candidates for object of the action in sentences of double contrast.

Footnotes

1 K'ekchi is a Mayan language of the Quichean family which is spoken by approximately 400,000 speakers in the Guatemalan departments of Alta Verapaz and Peten and in the southern portion of Belize. I want to thank Flora Ac and Amanda Katun of Coban, Alta Verapaz, and Ernesto Chen and Francisco Tzul of Chamelco, Alta Verapaz, for the data they gave me as well as for their helpful reactions to my analysis. Similarly, I want to thank the members of the Winter quarter Syntax/Semantics seminar at UCLA for their comments during the writing of this paper. Only I am responsible for any errors in fact or analysis which may remain. I also want to thank the Ford Foundation for their support during the data gathering stage of this project.

2 The humanness of the two noun phrases was systematically varied in addition to the animacy. As humanness and animacy were both found to work alike, only the results for sentences having animate or inanimate subjects or objects are reported.

3 The sentences in 1-60 have the following verb complex:

ẍ-	ø-	ẍ-	Verb
past	3rd abs (obj)	3rd erg (subj)	

Abs = absolutive; erg = ergative. For more information about the ergative system of pronouns in K'ekchi see "Studies in K'ekchi", Texas Linguistic Forum 3, University of Texas at Austin, 1976. Also note [ẇ] and [ẏ] are obstruentized glides.

4 Amanda Katun's responses were like those of Flora Ac. Since they are both from Coban I have labelled their responses Coban and those of Ernesto Chen

and Francisco Tzul, Chamelco.

5 There are definite and non-definite objects in K'ekchi as underlined below in sentences 71-75.

Non-definite (by object incorporation)
(71) li iẍq ẍtiqwasi:nk ẇa.
'The woman only heated tortillas.'

Definite
(72) li iẍq ẍtiqwasi xun(li) ẇa.
'The woman heated a tortilla.'

(73) li iẍq ẍtiqwasi li ẇa.
'The woman heated the tortilla.'

(74) li iẍq ẍtiqwasi inẇa.
'The woman heated my tortilla.'

(75) li iẍq ẍtiqwasi oẍib ẇa.
'The woman heated three tortillas.'

Note that the object having undergone object incorporation has no article or defining particle or affix. Further note that definite objects are objects of surface transitive verbs; non-definite objects are objects of surface intransitive verbs. I have used the term specific to refer to an object like that in (73) and the term non-specific to refer to an object like (72) to distinguish the type of article found with each object noun phrase.

6 Francis Eachus and Ruth Carlson, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Coban, (personal communication) have observed that xunli is the non-specific article and that xun, if used as an article of a single noun, will be found with foreign loans. For example:

(76) li iẍq ẍloq' xunli sek. (native K'ekchi)
'The woman bought a cup.'

(77) li iẍq ẍloq' xun b'as. (foreign loan =
'The woman bought a glass.' Spanish vaso)

While my observations are not entirely consistent with theirs, I did check to see whether the use of xunli would change the results I had gotten using xun for non-specific subjects (sentences 49-60). The results are the same whether speakers use xunli or xun.

7 Note that when the subject is animate and the object is inanimate as in sentences 78-80 below, VSO, OVS and OSV are acceptable word orders for the Coban speakers.

(78) ʸštiqwasi li iʸšq xun ẇa.
(79) xun ẇa ʸštiqwasi li iʸšq.
(80) xun ẇa li iʸšq ʸštiqwasi.
'The woman heated a tortilla.'

8 The direct object may be separated from the verb by the indirect object as in sentence (81).

(81) li iʸšq ʸšk'e re li ẇi:nq li hu.
'The woman gave the man the book.'

9 re is a possessive-like construction which acts as a preposition. It refers to the indirect object of a sentence and to the demoted direct object of a sentence which has undergone the Antipassive. For further information about its structure see Freeze (1976) and Stone (1976).
Note that an underlying transitive sentence which has undergone the Antipassive has a surface absolutive subject pronoun affix and a surface intransitive verb. Note also that subject preposing seems to be obligatory given sentences 82-87 below, in contrast with other Mayan languages, e.g., Chuj (Maxwell 1975).

(82) ? ʸšsak' li c'iʔ xun ẇi:nq.
(83) xun ẇi:nq ʸšsak'ok re li c'iʔ.
(84) * ʸšsak'ok re li c'iʔ xun ẇi:nq.
'A man hit the dog.'

(85) ʸšsak' li c'iʔ.
(86) haʔan ʸšsak'ok re li c'iʔ.
(87) *ʸšsak'ok re li c'iʔ (haʔan).
'He hit the dog.'

Note, finally, that the glosses given for these sentences are loose translations. A gloss which is more semantically precise is given in sentence (68), although such a gloss may be structurally misleading.

10 These sentences are from Li Raxquehob, Biblioteca Popular Latinoamericana, Union Panamericana, Secretaria General de la Organizacion de los Estados Americanos, Washington, D.C. The examples are presented here using phonetic orthography for clarity rather

than the conventional Spanish orthography in which they were published.

11 The phrase sa? xun čik kutan seems to be preposed for contrastive reasons.

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